



Achieving Interoperability across the Commonwealth of Virginia through the National Information Exchange Model

Posted by Joseph Grubbs, VA Data Governance Service Lead & HITSAC Administrator on Monday, November 5, 2012

In May 2012, Virginia's General Assembly adopted language in the 2012 Appropriation Act requiring the Commonwealth's Secretary of Technology to work with all cabinet secretaries and their agencies to standardize "citizen-centric" data. The move reflects the legislature's increased awareness of the need to reduce data redundancy, enforce data quality, and realize a higher return on investment for data assets.

The [Virginia Information Technologies Agency \(VITA\)](#) ^[1], working on behalf of the Secretary and the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the Commonwealth, has centered its compliance strategy on migrating Commonwealth agencies toward conformance with the [National Information Exchange Model \(NIEM\)](#) ^[2].

By integrating NIEM into the Commonwealth's enterprise information architecture program, VITA will be able to enforce a common discipline, an established, stable set of standards, and a shared vocabulary to support semantic interoperability for person-related data across state government.

VITA's NIEM integration strategy will give Commonwealth agencies the ability to map data elements in legacy systems and commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) solutions toward a NIEM-conformant [Information Exchange Package \(IEP\)](#) ^[3]. For new systems, VITA will support agencies in their implementation of NIEM standards throughout the system lifecycle. Compliance with adopted standards also will be a required element in VITA's review and approval process for new projects.

Virginia's adoption of NIEM represents the Commonwealth's latest step toward enterprise data governance and standardization. The state has made significant progress on interoperability in the health information technology (IT) domain, based on guidance from its [Health IT Standards Advisory Committee \(HITSAC\)](#) ^[4].

More than 125 health IT standards have been adopted during the past year based on HITSAC recommendations, including implementation guides, data exchange, vocabulary, messaging, and technology standards. VITA maintains the inventory of adopted Commonwealth standards in [a searchable, web-based repository](#) ^[5] (click the image to follow the link to the VITA repository):

[5]

VITA views its NIEM integration strategy as an opportunity to bring the other domains of state government up to the level of interoperability achieved in the health domain, as well as a framework for building information exchanges across domains and levels of government.

The agency has started implementing its NIEM strategy by mapping adopted standards for person data to a NIEM-conformant IEP. Also, in late November, VITA will host an onsite NIEM technical training by the [Integrated Justice Information System \(IJIS\) Institute](#) [6] for data stewards across the Commonwealth.

VITA recognizes that achieving interoperability through a NIEM-conformant strategy will be an incremental process. In the coming weeks, the Secretary of Technology will transmit to the General Assembly his interim plan for meeting the new statutory requirements. The final plan, which will include a cost estimate, scope, and schedule for NIEM conformance, will be ready in July 2013.

For more information on Virginia's technology oversight and enterprise architecture, visit the [VITA Technology Oversight website](#) [7].

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.vita.virginia.gov/>
- [2] <http://ise.gov/national-information-exchange-model-niem>
- [3] <https://www.niem.gov/technical/Pages/getting-started.aspx>
- [4] <http://www.vita.virginia.gov/ITAC/default.aspx?id=9706>
- [5] <http://www.vita.virginia.gov/oversight/dm/default.aspx?id=10344>
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